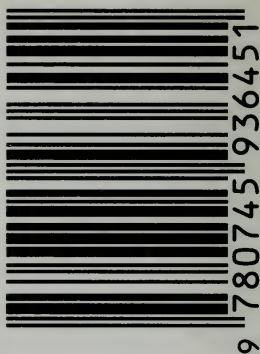




THE WISDOM OF JULIAN OF NORWICH



Compiled and introduced by
MONICA FURLONG



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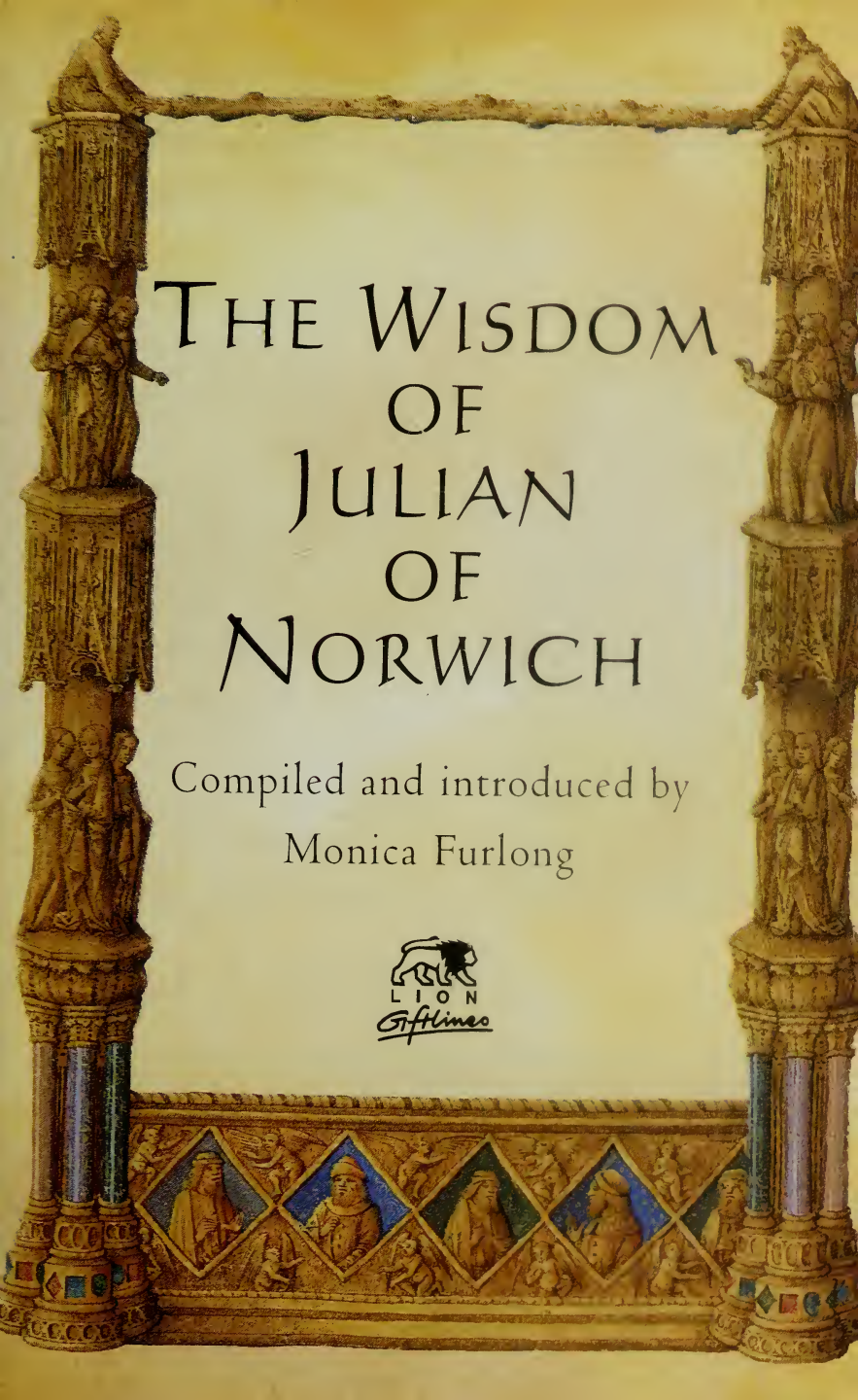
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THE WISDOM OF JULIAN OF NORWICH





The book cover features a highly decorative border. On the left and right sides are tall, classical columns. Each column is adorned with several tiers of carved figures, including what appear to be saints or historical figures in various poses. The columns are topped with ornate capitals. A horizontal band at the top connects the two columns, also featuring a carved figure. At the bottom, a wide decorative frieze contains a series of diamond-shaped medallions, each depicting a different figure, possibly biblical or historical. The entire border is rendered in a golden-brown, aged parchment style.

THE WISDOM OF JULIAN OF NORWICH

Compiled and introduced by
Monica Furlong



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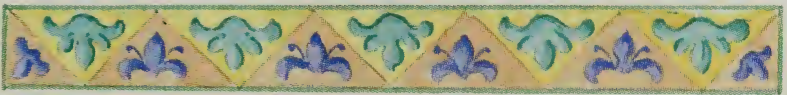
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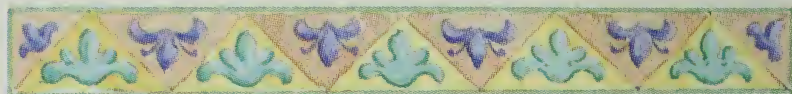
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INTRODUCTION

Julian of Norwich (1342—some time after 1416) lived in a particularly harsh period of English history. The Hundred Years' War, which had begun before her birth, was causing terrible suffering; there were outbreaks of the Black Death in Norwich; death and famine were apparent everywhere. The Peasants' Revolt of 1369, which emerged from acute poverty, was put down with gruesome reprisals. The local leader, Geoffrey Litster, was executed very near to Julian's cell. Writing in the midst of it all, with a mind full of compassion, and a deep questioning of why so much suffering was 'necessary', Julian had an overwhelming vision of the love of God, proclaiming, as the angels in the Bible did to the shepherds, that it was a love which 'shall be to all people'.



Julian was an anchoress, one who, with the agreement of her bishop, vowed never to leave her anchorhold, in Julian's case a hermitage by the church at Conisford, a district of Norwich. It was not a very uncommon way of life in the late Middle Ages. An anchoress often had the use of two or three rooms and a garden, and a servant to obtain food and other necessities. She would keep strict hours of prayer and practise some form of handicraft to keep herself. Sitting at a window, probably behind a curtain, she would act as a counsellor to local people who needed spiritual help and advice. Another religious woman, Margery Kempe, reports meeting Julian in just this way, and finding great consolation in their conversation.

The point of the confined life of the anchorhold was, paradoxically, to have space: space for prayer, to think about the things of God and, in Julian's case, to have an overwhelming vision of the crucified Christ.



In a sense Julian volunteered herself to enter more deeply into the mystery of meaning than most people would dare. Believing that Christ's crucifixion was central to comprehending the relationship between God and humanity, she prayed for a 'recollection' of it, what we might describe as a 'total immersion' in it. What she wanted was to see Christ on the cross for herself, as Mary Magdalen and others



had seen him. She prayed, too, for a personal experience of suffering, bodily and mental, and, finally, she asked to be granted to

feel a huge longing for God, and to have that appetite satisfied, if that was God's will. As time went on, Julian tells us, she forgot about the first two requests, but the third 'remained there continually'.

When, at the age of 'thirty and a half', she suddenly developed a desperately serious illness, she seems not to have thought of it as the answer to her prayer. She was so near to death that her mother, who was sitting by her, believed she had died, and went to close her eyes, but really Julian was undergoing the actual experience of Christ's death that she had asked for. It was, of course, horrific, but gradually the horror turned into a vision of Christ triumphant and joyful. In the course of it all Julian pondered deeply on questions of evil and suffering, of salvation and damnation, of human goodness and wickedness and, above all, of the infinite love and compassion of God.

She was later to write about her 'showings' in two books—the Short Text (ST), as we now call it, which she wrote immediately after she recovered, and the Long Text (LT), which was a reworking of it all twenty years later, when her theological and spiritual contemplation of the event had matured. I have quoted from



both texts. What strikes me again each time I read them is the wonderful sanity of Julian—a sort of modern Job—as she struggles with the terrible issues of pain and suffering and evil, determined to work out, if she can, how they can be compatible with God's love. She wants answers. Her struggle emerges from a love and sympathy with suffering humanity, her longing to see people delivered from their pain and sorrow and released into the joy of God. Her own hard-won awareness is that 'all shall be well, all manner of things shall be well.'

MONICA FURLONG

March 1996

THE WORLD AND THE SOUL



THE WORLD SUSTAINED BY GOD



Our Lord showed me a spiritual sight of his familiar love. I saw that he is to us everything which is good and comforting for our help. He is our clothing, for he is that love which wraps and enfolds us, embraces us and guides us, surrounds us for his love, which is so tender that he may never desert us. And so in this sight I saw truly that he is everything which is good, as I understand. And in this he showed me something small, no bigger than a hazelnut, lying in the palm of my hand, and I perceived that it was as round as any ball. I looked at it and thought: What can this be? And I was given this general answer: It is everything which is made. I was amazed that it could last, for I thought that it was so little that it could suddenly fall into nothing. And I was answered in my understanding: It lasts and always will, because God loves it; and thus everything has being through the love of God.

Showings. ST. Chapter 4

WORLDLY DISTRACTIONS



This is the reason why those who deliberately occupy themselves with earthly business, constantly seeking worldly well-being, have not God's rest in their hearts; for they love and seek their rest in this thing which is so little and in which there is no rest, and do not know God who is almighty, all wise and all good. God wishes to be known, and it pleases him that we should rest in him; for all things which are beneath him are not sufficient for us.

ST. Chapter 4

PARTNERSHIP WITH GOD



Prayer unites the soul to God, for although the soul may always be like God in nature and substance, it is often unlike him in condition, through human sin. Prayer makes the soul like God when the soul wills as God wills; then it is like God in condition, as it is in nature. And so he teaches us to pray and to have firm trust that we shall have what we pray for, because everything which is done would be done, even though we had never prayed for it. But God's love is so great that he regards us as partners in his good work; and so he moves us to pray for what it pleases him to do, for whatever prayer or good desire comes to us by his gift he will repay us for, and give us eternal reward.

ST. Chapter 19

RESTING IN GOD



[Sometimes] it seems to the soul that God has been moved to look upon it, as though it had been in pain or in prison, saying: I am glad that you have found rest, for I have always loved you and I love you now, and you love me.

ST. Chapter 19



CHOOSING GOD



It is God's will that we accept his commands and his consolations as generously and as fully as we are able; and he also wants us to accept our tarrying and our suffering as lightly as we are able, and to count them as nothing. For the more lightly we accept them, the less importance we ascribe to them because of our love, the less pain shall we experience from them and the more thanks shall we have for them. In this blessed revelation I was truly taught that any man or woman who voluntarily chooses God in his lifetime may be sure that he too is chosen.

ST. Chapter 20



JESUS IN US



Our Lord opened my spiritual eyes, and showed me my soul in the midst of my heart. I saw my soul as wide as if it were a kingdom, and from the state in which I saw it, it seemed to me as if it were a fine city. In the midst of this sits our Lord Jesus, true God and true man, a handsome person and tall, honourable, the greatest lord. And I saw him splendidly clad in honours. He sits erect there in the soul, in peace and rest, and he rules and he guards heaven and earth and everything that is. The humanity and the divinity sit at rest, and the divinity rules and guards, without instruments or effort. And my soul is blessedly occupied by the divinity, sovereign power, sovereign wisdom, sovereign goodness. The place which Jesus takes in our soul he will nevermore vacate, for in us is his home of homes, and it is the greatest delight for him to dwell there.

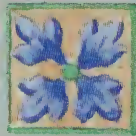
ST. Chapter 22

‘YOU WILL NOT BE OVERCOME’



These words: You will not be overcome, were said very insistently and strongly [by Jesus], for certainty and strength against every tribulation which may come. He did not say: You will not be assailed, you will not be belaboured, you will not be disquieted, but he said: You will not be overcome.

ST. Chapter 22



DESIRE



GOD ALONE IS ENOUGH



God, of your goodness give me yourself, for you are enough for me, and I can ask for nothing which is less which can pay you full worship. And if I ask anything which is less, always I am in want; but only in you do I have everything.

LT. Chapter 5

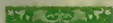


GOD'S LOVE—OUR FULFILMENT



There is no created being who can know how much and how sweetly and how tenderly the Creator loves us. And therefore we can with his grace and his help persevere in spiritual contemplation, with endless wonder at this high, surpassing, immeasurable love which our Lord in his goodness has for us; and therefore we may with reverence ask from our lover all that we will, for our natural will is to have God, and God's good will is to have us, and we can never stop willing or loving until the time comes that we shall be filled full in heaven.

LT. Chapter 6



LOVE IS MORE THAN VISIONS



I am not good because of [my] revelations, but only if I love God better; and inasmuch as you love God better, it is more to you than to me. I do not say this to those who are wise, because they know it well. But I say it to you who are simple, to give you comfort and strength; for we are all one in love, for truly it was not revealed to me that God loves me better than the humblest soul who is in a state of grace. For I am sure that there are many who never had revelations or visions, but only the common teaching of Holy Church, who love God better than I. If I pay special attention to myself I am nothing at all; but in general I am, I hope, in the unity of love with all my fellow Christians.

LT. Chapter 9



SAFE WITH GOD



Once my understanding was let down into the bottom of the sea, and there I saw green hills and valleys, with the appearance of moss, strewn with seaweed and gravel. Then I understood in this way: that if a man or woman were there under the wide waters, if he could see God, as God is continually with man, he would be safe in soul and body, and come to no harm. And furthermore, he would have more consolation and strength than all this world can tell.

LT. Chapter 10



THREE GIFTS



It is God's will that we receive three things from him as gifts as we seek. The first is that we seek willingly and diligently without sloth, as that may be with his grace, joyfully and happily, without unreasonable depression and useless sorrow. The second is that we wait for him steadfastly, out of love for him, without grumbling and contending against him, to the end of our lives, for that will last only for a time. The third is that we have great trust in him, out of complete and true faith, for it is his will that we know that he will appear, suddenly and blessedly, to all his lovers. For he works in secret, and he will be perceived, and his appearing will be very sudden. And he wants to be trusted, for he is very accessible, familiar and courteous, blessed may he be.

LT. Chapter 10

GOD'S FEAST



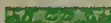
My understanding was lifted up into heaven,
where I saw our Lord God as a lord in his own
house, who has called all his friends to a
splendid feast. Then I did not see him seated
anywhere in his own house; but I saw him reign

in his house as a king and
fill it all full of joy and
mirth, gladdening and

consoling his
dear friends
with himself,
very familiarly
and courteously,
with wonderful
melody in
endless love in
his own fair
blissful
countenance.



LT. Chapter 14





JOY



DESOLATION AND JOY



I was changed, and abandoned to myself, oppressed and weary of my life and ruing myself, so that I hardly had the patience to go on living. I felt that there was no ease or comfort for me except faith, hope and love, and truly I felt very little of this. And then presently God gave me again comfort and rest for my soul, delight and security so blessedly and so powerfully that there was no fear, no sorrow, no pain, physical or spiritual, that one could suffer which might have disturbed me. And then again I felt the pain, and then afterwards the delight and the joy, now the one and now the other, again and again, I suppose about twenty times. And in the time of joy I could have said with St. Paul: Nothing shall separate me from the love of Christ; and in the pain I could have said with St. Peter: Lord, save me, I am perishing.

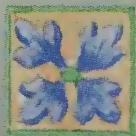
LT. Chapter 15

WHAT GOD HAS DONE FOR US



It is God's will that we have true delight with him in our salvation, and in it he wants us to be greatly comforted... For we are his bliss, because he endlessly delights in us; and so with his grace shall we delight in him. All that he does for us and has done and will do was never expense or labour to him, nor could it be, except only that he died in our humanity, beginning at the sweet Incarnation and lasting until his blessed Resurrection on Easter morning. So long did the labour and expense of our redemption last, in which deed he always and endlessly rejoices.

LT. Chapter 23



'I AM HE'



After this our Lord showed himself to me, and he appeared to me more glorified than I had seen him before, in which I was taught that our soul will never have rest till it comes into him, acknowledging that he is full of joy, familiar and courteous and blissful and true life. Again and again our Lord said, I am he, I am he, I am he who is highest. I am he whom you love. I am he in whom you delight. I am he whom you serve. I am he for whom you long. I am he whom you desire. I am he whom you intend. I am he who is all.

LT. Chapter 26



ALL WILL BE WELL...



Because of the tender love which our good Lord has for all who will be saved, he comforts readily and sweetly, meaning this: It is true that sin is the cause of all this pain, but all will be well, and every kind of thing will be well. These words were revealed most tenderly, showing no kind of blame to me or to anyone who will be saved.

LT. Chapter 27



SIN



WHY SIN IS ALLOWED



I saw hidden in God an exalted and wonderful mystery, which he will make plain and we shall know in heaven. In this knowledge we shall truly see the cause why he allowed sin to come, and in this sight we shall rejoice forever.

LT. Chapter 27



LOVE FOR OTHERS



Then I saw that every natural compassion which one has for one's fellow Christians in love is Christ in us, and that every kind of self-humiliation which he manifested in his Passion was manifested again in this compassion, in which there were two different understandings of our Lord's intention. One was the bliss that we are brought to, in which he wants us to rejoice. The other is for consolation in our pain.

II. Chapter 28



GOD THIRSTS FOR US



As truly as there is in God a quality of pity and compassion, so truly is there in God a quality of thirst and longing; and the power of this longing in Christ enables us to respond to his longing, and without this no soul comes to heaven. And this quality of longing and thirst comes from God's everlasting goodness, just as the quality of pity comes from his everlasting goodness. And though he may have both longing and pity, they are different qualities, as I see them: and this is the characteristic of spiritual thirst, which will persist in him so long as we are in need, and will draw us up into his bliss.

LT. Chapter 31

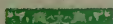


EVERYTHING PUT RIGHT



There is a deed which the blessed Trinity will perform on the last day, as I see it, and what the deed will be and how it will be performed is unknown to every creature... and it will be until the deed is done. This is the great deed ordained by our Lord God from without beginning, treasured and hidden in his blessed breast, known only to himself, through which deed he will make all things well. For just as the blessed Trinity created all things from nothing, just so will the same blessed Trinity make everything well which is not well... And all this being so, it seemed to me that it was impossible that every kind of thing should be well, as our Lord revealed at this time. And to this I had no other answer as a revelation from our Lord except this: What is impossible to you is not impossible to me. I shall preserve my word in everything, and I shall make everything well.

LT. Chapter 32



SWEET HARMONY



Everything which our Lord God does is righteous, and all which he tolerates is honourable; and in these two are good and evil comprehended. For our Lord does everything which is good, and our Lord tolerates what is evil. I do not say that evil is honourable, but I say that our Lord God's toleration is honourable, through which his goodness will be known eternally, and his wonderful meekness and mildness by this working of mercy and grace.

Righteousness is that which is so good that it cannot be better than it is, for God himself is true righteousness, and all his works are righteously performed, as they are ordained from eternity by his exalted power, his exalted wisdom, his exalted goodness. And what he has ordained for the best he constantly brings to pass in the same way, and directs to the same end... And the contemplation of this blessed harmony is most sweet to the soul which sees it by grace.

MERCY AND RIGHTEOUSNESS



Mercy is an operation which comes from the goodness of God, and it will go on operating so long as sin is permitted to harass righteous souls. And when sin is no longer permitted to harass, then the operation of mercy will cease. And then all will be brought into righteousness and stand fast there forever. By his toleration we fall, and in his blessed love, with his power and his wisdom, we are protected, and by mercy and grace we are raised to much more joy. And so in righteousness and in mercy he wishes to be known and loved, now and forever. And the soul that wisely contemplates in grace is well satisfied with both, and endlessly delights.

LT. Chapter 35



SIN CANNOT IMPEDE GOD



Our Lord God revealed that a deed will be done and he himself will do it, and it will be honourable and wonderful and plentiful, and it will be done with respect to me, and he himself will do it. And this is the highest joy that the soul understood, that God himself will do it, and I shall do nothing at all but sin; and my sin will not impede the operation of his goodness. And I saw that the contemplation of this is a heavenly joy in a soul which fears God and always lovingly through grace desires the will of God. This deed will be begun here, and it will be honour to God and to the plentiful profit of all his lovers on earth; and as we come to heaven each one of us will see it with wonderful joy; and it will go on operating until the last day. And the honour and the bliss of it will last in heaven before God and all his holy saints eternally.

II. Chapter 36

GOD LOVES US AS WE ARE



Our Lord revealed this to me in the completeness of his love, that we are standing in his sight, yes, that he loves us now whilst we are here as well as he will when we are there, before his blessed face; but all our travail is because love is lacking on our side.

LT. Chapter 37



PRAYER



A FORETASTE OF JOY



Prayer is a right understanding of that fulness of joy which is to come, with true longing and trust. The savouring or seeing of our bliss, to which we are ordained, by nature makes us to long; true understanding and love, with a sweet recollection in our savour by grace makes us to trust. And in these two operations our Lord constantly regards us, for this is our duty, and his goodness cannot assign any less to us than it is our obligation diligently to perform. And when we do it, still it will seem to us that it is nothing. And this is true. But let us do what we can, and meekly ask mercy and grace, and everything which is lacking in us we shall find in him. And this is what he means when he says: I am the foundation of your beseeching.

LT. Chapter 42

IMPERCEPTIBLE PRAYER



When our courteous Lord of his special grace shows himself to our soul, we have what we desire, and then for that time we do not see what more we should pray for, but all our intention and all our powers are wholly directed to contemplating him. And as I see it, this is an exalted and an imperceptible prayer; for the whole reason why we pray is to be united into the vision and contemplation of him to whom we pray.

LT. Chapter 43



KNOWING OURSELVES AND GOD



Our passing life which we have here does not know in our senses what our self is, but we know in our faith. And when we know and see, truly and clearly, what our self is, then we shall truly and clearly see and know our Lord God in the fulness of joy. And therefore it must necessarily be that the nearer we are to bliss, the more we shall long both by nature and by grace. We may have knowledge of ourselves in this life by the continuing help and power of our exalted nature, in which knowledge we may increase and grow by the furthering and help of mercy and grace. But we may never fully know ourselves until the last moment, at which moment this passing life and every kind of pain and woe will have an end. And therefore this belongs to our properties, both by nature and by grace to long and desire with all our powers to know ourselves, in which full knowledge we shall truly and clearly know our God in the fulness of endless joy.



WE NEVER SHALL BE LOST



In endless love we are led and protected by God, and we never shall be lost; for he wants us to know that the soul is a life, which life of his goodness and his grace will last in heaven without end, loving him, thanking him, praising him. And just as we were to be without end, so we were treasured and hidden in God, known and loved from without beginning. Therefore he wants us to know that the noblest thing which he ever made is mankind, and the fullest substance and the highest power is the blessed soul of Christ. And furthermore, he wants us to know that this beloved soul was preciousy knitted to him in its making, by a knot so subtle and so mighty that it is united in God. In this uniting it is made endlessly holy. Furthermore, he wants us to know that all the souls which will be saved in heaven without end are knit in this knot, and united in this union, and made holy in this holiness.

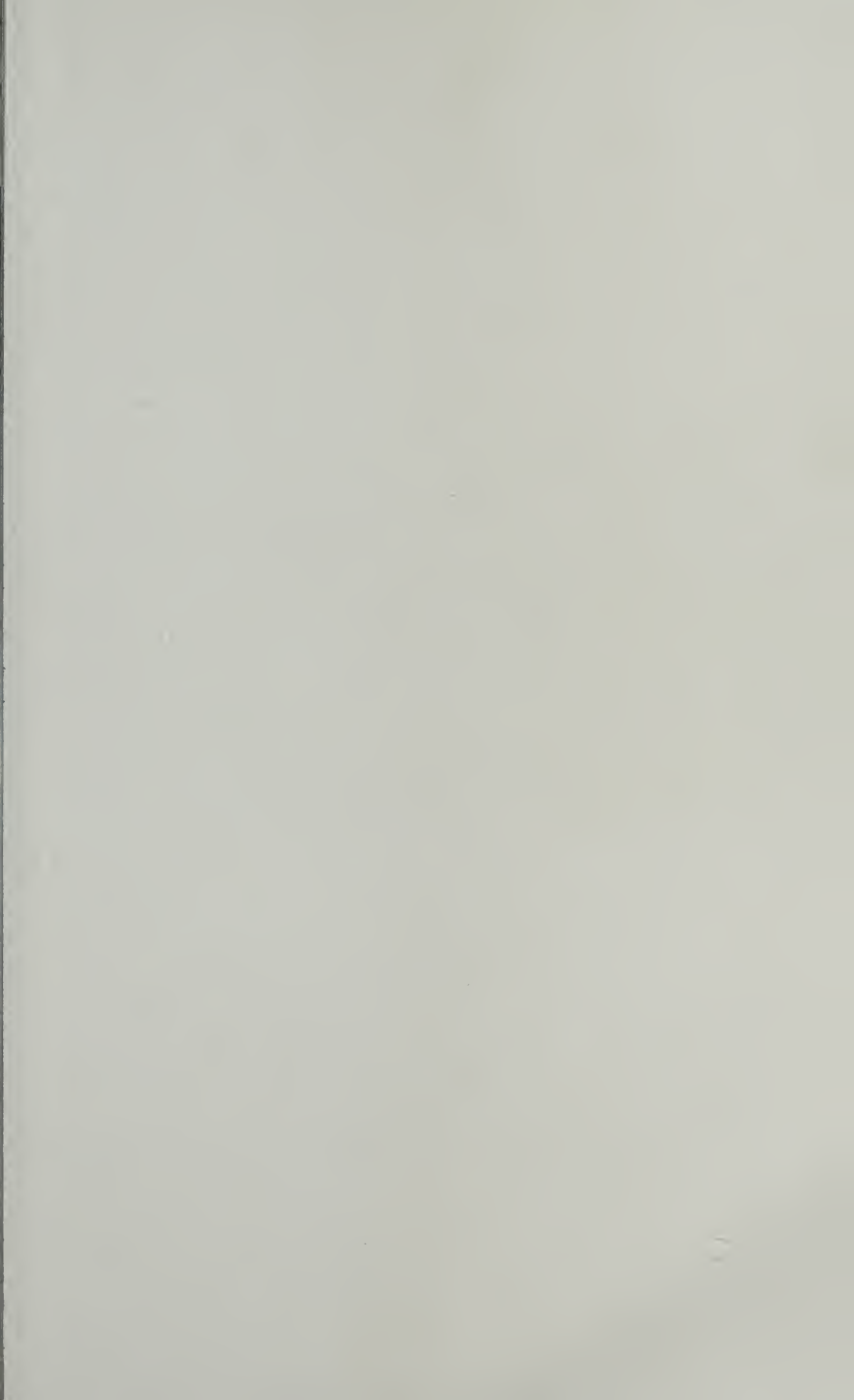
GOD OUR FATHER AND MOTHER



As truly as God is our Father, so truly is God our Mother, and he revealed that in everything, and especially in these sweet words where he says I am he; that is to say: I am he, the power and greatness of fatherhood; I am he, the wisdom and the lovingness of motherhood; I am he, the light and the grace which is all blessed love; I am he, the Trinity; I am he, the unity; I am he, the great supreme goodness of every kind of thing; I am he who makes you to love; I am he who makes you to long; I am he, the endless fulfilling of all true desires.

LT. Chapter 59





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Julian of Norwich, the most popular of the English mystics, described her vision of God in *Revelations of Divine Love*, a book now recognized as one of the greatest spiritual classics of all time.

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